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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000081

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SUBJECT: READOUT OF KUWAITI FOREIGN MINISTER'S JAN. 15-16
VISIT TO TEHRAN

REF: JONES-LEAF-MISENHEIMER 01/17/08 EMAILS

Classified By: CDA Alan Misenheimer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a January 17 meeting with Assistant Secretary of Energy Kevin Kolevar, Kuwait Petroleum

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Corporation General Counsel Nawaf Saud Nasir Al Sabah provided a brief readout of Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammad Al Sabah's January 15-16 visit to Tehran to co-chair a Joint Iranian-Kuwaiti Committee with Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki. Nawaf reported that no progress was made on any of the issues discussed in the meeting, which included Iranian water and gas exports to Kuwait and the resolution of a maritime border issue involving an offshore gas field. Nawaf insisted that Dr. Mohammad was caught by surprise when Mottaki inveighed against the U.S. in their joint press conference and said that a quote attributed to Dr. Mohammad about friends and enemies was taken out of context. Nawaf remarked that the timing of the visit, closely following the President's visit to Kuwait, was unfortunate but purely coincidental. End summary.

¶2. (C) In a January 17 meeting with visiting Assistant Secretary of Energy Kevin Kolevar and Econoff, Kuwait

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Petroleum Corporation General Counsel Nawaf Saud Nasir Al Sabah provided a brief readout of Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al Sabah's January 15-16 visit to Tehran to co-chair a meeting of a "Joint Iranian-Kuwaiti Committee" with Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki. The primary issues discussed in the meeting were prospective Iranian water and gas exports to Kuwait and the resolution of a continental shelf maritime border issue involving the Dorra offshore gas field. Shaykh Nawaf, who accompanied the Foreign Minister as an advisor, has participated in a number of meetings with the Iranians over these perennially unresolved bilateral issues since 2002.

FM ambushed at Press Conference

¶3. (C) Regarding a joint press conference held by both foreign ministers in which Mottaki railed against the U.S. and said President Bush would be deposed by his own party upon returning home, Nawaf said Dr. Mohammad was taken by surprise. He added, "The Iranians always try to embarrass us like this." According to Nawaf, Dr. Mohammad's now widely quoted statement that "My country knows who is our friend and who is our enemy," was prompted by a question from an Iranian journalist who asked if it was true that President Bush told the GOK during his January 11-12 visit to Kuwait that "Iran is your enemy, and the U.S. is your friend." Nawaf insists

that Dr. Mohammad's response was more along the lines of "We don't need anyone to tell us who is our friend and who is our enemy." He added that in private meetings with Ahmadinejad and Mottaki, Dr. Mohammad reminded the Iranians that the two Presidents Bush had liberated Iraq and removed Saddam Hussein so "of course Kuwait strongly supports President Bush and considers the U.S. to be a friend." Nawaf acknowledged that the timing of the visit to Iran was unfortunate, falling so closely in the wake of the President's January 11-12 visit to Kuwait, but insisted that the Iranian visit had been scheduled far in advance and the timing was purely coincidental.

¶4. (C) A January 17 press release by Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), following a meeting between Dr. Mohammad and the Kuwaiti National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee stated: "The Foreign Minister stressed that his latest visit to Tehran had nothing to do with the visit made by U.S. President George W. Bush to Kuwait for it was scheduled a month ago and came within the framework of the meetings held by the Joint Iranian-Kuwaiti Committee. He pointed out that Bush is highly appreciated in Kuwait while the United States is an ally to Kuwait and vice versa." (Comment: The FM continues, however, to walk the fine line of trying to keep both the U.S. and Iran satisfied. The Kuwaiti press release also refers to the "strategic nature" of Kuwait's relations with Iran and says that the Minister called for "strengthening relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran." The Foreign Minister also confirms "Kuwait's and Iran's intentions to safeguard the new Iraq as a secure and safe state in the interest of political stability in the entire region." End comment.)

No progress on water, gas, or border issues

¶5. (C) Shaykh Nawaf said that, as he expected based on his previous dealings with the Iranians, no concrete progress has

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been made on any of the three perennial issues of water, gas, and maritime borders. In fact, according to Nawaf, the gas export issue took a step backward as the Iranians said the terms of an MOU on gas exports signed in 2004 were now unacceptable. In any case, he added, Kuwait considers Iran to be a gas supplier of last resort in the event that a major planned increase in Kuwait's domestic gas production and plans to import LNG from Qatar both fall through. Additionally, he said, water imports were not a critical issue since Kuwaiti desalination plants were capable of meeting domestic water needs, albeit at significant cost. Despite press releases indicating significant forward movement on the Dorra gas field territorial dispute, Nawaf said no progress was made.

¶6. (C) On the atmospherics of the talks, Shaykh Nawaf said mid-level Iranian negotiators and technocrats were reasonable, but were frequently interrupted and overridden by political appointees who were more stubborn and dogmatic. Nawaf said the mid-level officials expressed embarrassment over the intervention by their political bosses and apologized for their behavior after they left the room. He said Ahmadinejad made no "outrageously crazy remarks" during this visit as he had in a previous meeting in which, responding to Kuwaiti environmental concerns over the Bushehr nuclear plant, Ahmadinejad promised that he was planning to move his own office to a location directly over the reactor's core.

¶7. (C) Post will follow up with the GOK as to whether, as reported in the press, the Foreign Minister's visit to Tehran was intended to pave the way for a visit by the Amir later this year.

Biographical Information

¶8. (C) Shaykh Nawaf is the former Director of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation's Washington office, and is the son of Shaykh Saud Nasir Al Sabah, former Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United States during the Iraqi occupation. He is the brother of Shaykh Fawaz Saud Nasir Al Sabah, who has been an advisor to the Amir for 21 years and served as notetaker in the Amir's meeting with the President. Nawaf's wife Mariam is the daughter of the Foreign Minister. They have two sons, ages four and one. The first was born on the same day that U.S. tanks rolled into Baghdad. Nawaf attended high school at Saint Alban's in Washington, DC and holds a B.A. from Princeton and a J.D. from Harvard.

¶9. (U) Assistant Secretary Kolevar did not clear this cable before departing Kuwait.

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